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THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET POLICY. . . REAL CHANGE OR MORE OF THE SAME?

An Individual Study Project Intended for Publication

by

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#### **ABSTRACT**

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

In Lenin's 1917 study of the political theory of Marx, The State and Revolution, he quoted the core of Marx's theory on the evolutionary development of communism:

Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>1</sup>

Lenin went on to talk about crushing the capitalists, the disappearance of classes, and the inevitable victory of communism in the "world struggle." He pointed out that, in <a href="Capital">Capital</a>, Marx ridiculed the bourgeois-democratic concepts of freedom, equality, and the rights of man.

Mikhail Gorbachev, in his speech to the United Nations on December 7, 1988, publicly embraced universal human values, freedom of choice, the rule of law, and unity in diversity. He rejected the use or threat of force, the "closed" society, the worldwide class struggle, and ideological conformity. He went on to describe the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution as "a most precious spiritual heritage," but added, "Today we face a different world, for which we must seek a different road to the future."

Gorbachev's apparent contradictions of communist theory and Soviet ideology—and his related initiatives—have caused a continuing controversy around the world. Some believe that he is truly opening up (glasnost) and re-structuring (perestroika) the Soviet Union while embarking on significant changes in Soviet policies. His detractors claim that he is just another communist trying to get a much-needed breathing spell (peredyshka)—changing his means, but implacable about the goal of Soviet domination of the world.

The purpose of this paper is to compare Gorbachev's key policies and ideological statements with those of other Soviet leaders who have been dominant during the historical development of the Soviet Union, to analyze these comparisons, and to formulate conclusions on the evolution of Soviet policy—to answer the question: Is Mikhail Gorbachev merely devising new and more clever means for continuing the October Revolution and expanding Soviet hegemony, or is he making real changes in both the means and ends of Soviet policy?

#### II. GLASNOST

Did glasnost spring, full-born, from Gorbachev's mind?

Basic research reveals that it is older than the Revolution.

It was one of the main demands made by nineteenth-century

Russian radicals in the early issues of Kolokol (The Bell), the only free Russian periodical published at the time. The term was used by Lenin some forty times in his works, mainly after

the Revolution. Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev paid lip service to it when it suited their purposes, and the word appears in the 1977 Soviet Constitution.

The 1987 Soviet Political Dictionary defines "glasnost" as a democratic principle that guarantees the "openness" of the work of the government to society, but it also calls it "the most developed form of control by the masses" over the government, especially local "bureaucratism." It says its most important channels are mass information, oral propaganda, and visual aids; and that state and military secrets, industrial production, crime investigation, and medicine are not subject to "glasnost." The lengthy definition closes with a note to see the entry on "Revolutionary Vigilance." One only need think of the party as the vanguard of the masses, and examine the references to "control, propaganda, the channels," and the exclusions to affirm that "glasnost" is not freedom of speech or the press. In fact, Grobachev frequently quotes Lenin's succinct definition of "glasnost": "Letting the party know everything."

In counterpoint to this, however, Grobachev's policy on "glasnost" has opened to exposure and criticism many more areas of Soviet life than any of the policies of his predecessors.

Among the examples are the harsh living conditions; the high crime rate, to include prostitution, drug abuse, and black marketeering; widespread alcoholism; poor health services; a world-high abortion rate; low production rates; budget deficits; and even the "mistakes" of Stalin and Brezhnev.

Gorbachev's "glasnost" has also fostered the rehabilitation of dissidents like Andrei Sakharov, Josef Begun, and Roy A.

Medvedev; and permitted them to publicly criticize varied aspects of the Soviet system and society.

What a contrast to Lenin's dictum of "Down with non-partisan writers! Down with literary supermen! Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat..."

Gorbachev has made a significant change in policy with "glasnost"--Freedom of speech, it ain't"--but a verse of Horace applies here: "Semel emissum volat irrevocabile verbum"--"A word once spoken cannot be revoked." Glasnost now has a momentum of its own. 3

#### III. ECONOMIC POLICIES

"Perestroika," not the party, is the vanguard of Gorbachev's economic policies. He sees that "The world economy is becoming a single organism, and no state, whatever its social or economic status, can develop normally outside it. (UN Speech, Dec. 7, 1988)." He also has long known that the Soviet economy is a decaying part of that organism. Does this mean that he will graft buds of Western economies onto the Soviet economy, merge economically with the free market, or even reject the evolution of the communist economy for capitalism?

His predecessors have stressed over and over that:

There will be no private ownership of the instruments and means of production, but social, collective ownership...The national economy (will be), organized according to plan...Products will be distributed according to the principle of the old French communists: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."

Based on this--and Gorbachev's initiatives to obtain Western credits; establish joint production ventures, especially those involving technology; lease plots for private farming; permit limited entrepreneurship on consumer items; base pay on performance and sales; and even permit workers to buy shares in their enterprises -- a sea change appears to be taking place in Soviet economic policy. However, a look beneath Lenin's surface ideology indicates that, perhaps, this is only a change in the tide. For example, despite Lenin's ideological declarations, he granted timber, agricultural, and mineral concessions to capitalists after the Civil War in exchange for their investments in re-building the Soviet economy. He also launched the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921, under which farmers could sell produce on the open market; control of small factories reverted to private individuals; individuals were allowed to engage in retail trade; and coercion was replaced by market incentives. similarities to perestroika are striking!

All this changed significantly under Stalin who feared that these seeds of capitalism were about to bloom in Soviet society. To kill them, he launched the first Five-Year Plan, which called for industrial projects to be financed by production of agricultural collectives. Industrial growth was remarkable, averaging 12 percent annually; but the costs were food shortages, rationing, and an estimated five million peasants who were killed or sent to prison camps for resisting collectivization. In Western eyes, and presumably Gorbachev's, this was a return to a "pure" communist evolution in Soviet economic policy.

Khrushchev tilted economic policies back toward improving living standards, especially through agricultural reforms like the virgin lands program and the formation of regional economic councils (sovnerkhozes). He tried to accomplish this within the framework of communist ideology while keeping up industrial development at the same time. He later began to shift economic priorities frequently from agriculture to industry to the military, and back again. One of the results of this inconsistency in policy was that, by the early 1960's, the Soviets had to buy huge quantities of grain from Canada and the US. Thus while Khrushchev's policies were certainly closer to Gorbachev's than Stalin's, in many ways they were not as market-oriented as Lenin's.

Although Brezhnev led the planting of over 100 million virgin acres under Khrushchev in the 1950s and '60s, he immediately turned economic policies back in a Stalinist

direction after Khurshchev was ousted: The regional economic "sovnarkhozes" were dismantled and steel ingots and bullets got precedence over bread and butter. However, due to good growing seasons, the Eighth Five-Year Plan (1966-70) was largely successful. Brezhnev continued the policy of increasing defense spending by an estimated 6-plus percent per year, while making deeper and deeper cuts in industrial and consumer investments.

As GNP growth and the standard of living declined,
Brezhnev turned to detente and the West. The Soviets bought
grain again, tried to increase trade and joint ventures with
the West, and sought "most favored nation" status. The US
Congress countered with the Jackson-Vanik and Stevenson
Amendments and other actions designed to extract concessions on
human rights in exchange for economic concessions. Intertwined
with these policies and actions, Brezhnev continued to attack
the West ideologically, publicly reiterating the old French
communist cliche about ability and need; and promising, as
Khurshchev had, to win the world struggle.

All Soviet leaders have had to proclaim and implement economic policies that didn't square with ideology or reality. However, Gorbachev is the first to seriously link economic reforms with reforms in human rights and defense policies; and with the possible exception of Lenin, the first to delve seriously into private and market-based economic policies. If, as Zbigniew Brzezinski contends, there was unilinear decline in Soviet leadership from Lenin through Brezhnev, 5 there now

appears to be a significant "blip" upward under Gorbachev, which very much includes the integration of economic policies with other policies on a global basis, and the concurrent re-structuring of the Soviet economy.

# IV. DEFENSE POLICIES

Since the end of the Revolution to the present, Soviet defense policy, unlike economic policy, has been consistent and predictable: To get strong, stronger, strongest—no matter the cost. Thus the Soviet Union today is, in many areas, the strongest military power in the world. The policy of doing whatever it takes to build defense has its roots in Lenin's adoption of Clausewitz's dictum:

"War is the continuation of politics by other (violent) means." Marxists have always rightly regarded this thesis as the theoretical basis of views on the significance of any war. It was from this viewpoint that Marx and Engels always regarded the various wars.

Based on this, the Bolsheviks developed a policy of "War Communism" to force their politics and ideology into all aspects of Soviet society: defense, economics, agriculture, internal security, religion, education, etc.; but due to the economic chaos this caused, Lenin significantly modified it with his New Economic Policy.

The Great Patriotic War, the culmination of the many invasions of "impotent Mother Russia," is today still a driver of Soviet defense policy, even under Gorbachev. This war, indelible on the Russian experience, was very nearly lost because, although Stalin strengthened defense through increased industrialization, his paranoid purges decimated the leadership of the Red Army before the war. After the courage of the Soviet soldiers, the Russian winter, \$11 billion in US and British aid, and Germany's two-front war finally brought victory, Stalin cleverly asked, "What did we gain by concluding the non-aggression pact with Germany?" His answer is reminiscent of the "peredyshka" that Gorbachev is now accused of trying to obtain: "We secured our country peace for a year and a half and the possibility of preparing our forces to repulse Fascist Germany."

Stalin used the Red Army near and after the end of the war to create a "defensive buffer" between the Soviet Union and the capitalist world—a buffer that today is a polyglot of trends affecting Gorbachev's defense policies. The machinations of Stalin's aggressive defense policies—atom bomb espionage, occupation of Austria, civil war in Greece, pressure on Turkey, the Berlin Blockade—brought on Churchill's "iron curtain" declaration, the US policy of containment, and established a cold war extreme that made Khrushchev's policies seem moderate by comparison.

Khrushchev's erratic balancing act in the midst of his rivals extended to his defense policies. He proffered a "thaw," "peaceful coexistence," and "de-Stalinization" in one hand; and, in the other, a strategic arms race, crises in Berlin and Cuba, "wars of national liberation," and a promise to "bury us." Some of Gorbachev's detractors have accused him of being a vacillating reformer like Khrushchev. The comparison does not hold up, especially in the evolution of his non-confrontational defense policies vis-a-vis perestroika.

Where Khrushchev concentrated on expanding selected areas of defense, especially the strategic, Brezhnev applied expansion across the spectrum. His reasons for doing so included instability in the developing world and the danger of nuclear war as a result of the Soviets' international duties, the latter an extension of Lenin's reasoning. Thus Brezhnev caused Soviet defense spending to grow by an estimated 6-plus percent per year; and although the people and the economy suffered, he kept on building weapons while implacably avoiding reality, as he did in his reports on the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union:

This also means that we shall accomplish the programme chartered by the Congress for achieving a substantial improvement in living standards...With respect to the main, general figures, such as the growth of national income, industrial output, trade and freight turnover, the results may

be assessed as fairly successful. The plan was fulfilled, and in some cases it was overfulfilled...the results may be considered good enough.<sup>8</sup>

Contrast this hogwash with Gorbachev's bluntness about why perestroika is needed:

At some stage--this became particularly clear in the latter half of the seventies... The country began to lose momentum. Economic failures became more frequent...And all this happened at a time when scientific and technological revolution opened up new prospects for economic and social progress.

Brezhnev, like his crony Chernenko did later, talked of butter and made guns. Like Khrushchev, he proffered, in one hand, "peaceful" detente, with SALT agreements, a space treaty, and some force re-shuffling in Eastern Europe; while, in the other, he crushed the Prague Spring, incited the Arab nations to war against Israel; congratulated his "comrades-in-arms," the Vietnamese Communists, telling them, "The victory of Vietnam is graphic proof of the effectiveness of the internationalist policy of the Soviet Union;" and he invaded Afghanistan. Thus did Lenin's international struggle, Stalin's expansionism, and Khrushchev's duplicitous "peaceful" arms race evolve into Brezhnev's international arms support, armed intervention, and detente-based building of "super armament."

Regarded by some as the next calcified cog in the geriatric machine, Andropov indirectly changed the evolution of Soviet defense policy by mentoring and bringing in Mikhail Gorbachev. Gorbachev's "new thinking" in defense policy appears to be based on his declaration to the United Nations that "The use or threat of force no longer can or must be an instrument of foreign policy." As a result, he has responded to Lenin's internationalism by pressuring the Vietnamese to withdraw from Cambodia; by cooperating in plans to get the Cubans out of Angola; reducing arms shipments to Nicaragua; and promising unilateral force reductions on the Chinese border.

He has turned Stalin's expansionism a step backward by withdrawing from Afghanistan and loosening control of the Eastern European buffer states; and he has started to reverse the duplications arms race by promising unprecedented unilateral force reductions, pushing for conventional arms reduction talks in Europe, signing a verifiable INF Treaty, continuing negotiations on a START Treaty; and by promising reductions in the military budget and conversion of some military plants to civilian use. Most of these initiatives are just first steps; but they are a start in a new direction. They indicate that significant changes in the evolution of Soviet defense policy are in the offing.

# V. WORLD VIEW: FOREIGN POLICIES

Soviet leaders have historically viewed the world as an arena in which the capitalists have waged aggressive, but futile struggles against the inevitable victory of the communists, who were first rallied by Marx and Engels with the battle cry, "Workers of all countries, unite!" Lenin expressed his confidence in the outcome of the worldwide struggle in many ways, none more unique than, "When we are victorious on a world scale I think we shall use gold for the purpose of building public lavatories..." Stalin justified repression by his state by declaring that Engels' postulate about the "withering away of the state" could only be fulfilled when the "capitalist encirclement is liquidated." 12

For Khrushchev, the promise of victory for the international proletariat in the world struggle had evolved, under his leadership, to where Marxist-Leninist teaching, as a theory and "living reality," was encompassing the globe. He declared that "The time is not far away when Marxism-Leninism will possess the minds of the majority of the world's population." Continuing the evolution of this view of the world, Brezhnev assured his comrades that "attempts of imperialism to turn the tide of history are bound to fail... The fighters against capitalist oppression are confronted by the last but the most powerful of the exploiting systems that have ever existed."

A logical extension of the evolution of this world view would postulate that the victory of communism is within reach; but Gorbachev has not extended the view--he has altered it.

Where Stalin thought in terms of "Our party...(as) a living organism," <sup>15</sup> Gorbachev declared at the UN that "The world economy is becoming a single organism." In a jab at the consistency in the evolution of the communist world view, he also said at the UN that "Life is forcing us to abandon established stereotypes and outdated views. It is forcing us to discard illusions." Thus Gorbachev has replaced the single lens through which the Soviets viewed the world with a multi-angled prism of many possibilities:

And we have not only read anew the reality of a multicolored and milti-dimensional world...We have seen the main issue--the growing tendency towards interdependence of the states of the world community. 16

Evidence of the evolutionary change in the Soviet world view is global: The approach to rapprochement and a summit with China; dialogue with, and credits from, Japan; Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia; diplomatic talks with Israel; withdrawal from Afghanistan; a softening of military support for surrogates around the world; an expansion of human rights and commitments to unilateral military reductions coincident to receipt of Western credits, joint ventures, and expansions in educational and cultural exchanges; and an easing of control and intimidation in Eastern Europe. How the seasons have

changed--the Prague Spring of 1968 has come to Moscow and the old cold-war winter has moved to Prague, East Berlin and Bucharest.

Of special interest to the West is the effect of the new Soviet world view on the "German Question." Russian fascination with, and fear of, Germany, and the German "Drang nach Osten" existed long before Lenin laid out the contradictions evolving under communism:

"Hate the Germans, kill the Germans"--such was, and is, the slogan of common, i.e., bourgeois, patriotism. But we will say, "Hate the imperialist plunderers, hate capitalism, death to capitalism" and at the same time "Learn from the Germans! Remain true to the brotherly alliance with the German workers. They are late in coming to our aid. We shall gain time, we shall live to see them coming, and they will come, to our aid. 17

Stalin and Khrushchev were implacable in their tight-fisted control of East Berlin and East Germany. This developed to such an extent that Brezhnev had to break Ulbricht's hard line in order to take advantage of Willy Brandt's "ostpolitik," and to keep detente alive. Gorbachev has a similar off-spring thorn in his side—the Honecker regime; but despite their entrenchment—as typified by the remarks of East German party ideologue, Kurt Hager, "If your

neighbor put up new wallpaper in his apartment, would you feel obligated to put up new wallpaper, too?"18--Gorbachev continues to woo and impress the West Germans.

The Soviets have begun to hint that something might be done about the "German Question." Last year, Valentin Fallin, a foreign policy adviser to Gorbachev and former ambassador to Bonn, suggested to West German officials that Gorbachev might offer to tear down the Berlin Wall in exchange for a West German agreement to a Central European nuclear-free zone and withdrawal of all foreign troops from both Germanies. 19 Such unique suggestions are not made by Soviet officials unless they are cleared with the boss.

Although Gorbachev himself has not made a direct statement on re-considering the division of Germany, a senior West German diplomat believes that Gorbachev's proposal for creating "a common European home"..."would be impossible without addressing the political division of East and West Germany;"20 and a member of the Bundestag wondered if "Maybe there is something that Moscow can do for us on Berlin, if we meet them halfway."21 Thus there are foreign policy analysts who anticipate that Gorbachev, in his drive to get assistance for perestroika, might soon serve up some surprises on the "German Question"--such as a proposal or deal on reunification.<sup>22</sup>

German reunification, for the present, however, seems to be at the outer limits of the possibilities opened up by the change in the Soviet world view. But the fact that it is even being considered with some seriousness—coupled with related

actions throughout the world--indicates just how far from the communists' tunnel vision Gorbachev's view of an interdependent world has turned, and how far his resulting branches of foreign policy have evolved from the singular communist trunk.

# VI. CONCLUSIONS

Comparison of Gorbachev's key policies and ideological statements with those of former Soviet leaders, and analysis of these comparisons, are the basis for the following conclusions on the evolution of Soviet policy:

- (1) Prior to Gorbachev, glasnost was used almost exclusively as a "tool" to strengthen the policy of party control over the people. Lenin used it more liberally than his successors (up to Gorbachev), but primarily as a means for starting the Revolution, developing communist theory, and then for party control. Under Gorbachev, glasnost has become a policy unto itself, opening up Soviet society, and driving forward the evolution and intergration of Soviet policies on perestroika, economics, defense and foreign affairs. This policy of glasnost, like the word once spoken, will be almost impossible to revoke.
- (2) Soviet leaders have historically been forced, by their defense policies and poor economic performance, especially in agriculture, to implement and report on economic policies that didn't square with communist ideology (e.g. dealing with capitalists) or reality (e.g. false reporting on

conditions, quotas and budgets). Under Gorbachev, Soviet economic policy has deviated from this rather uniform evolution to where economic perestroika is now linked to candid admissions of economic problems (i.e. spurred by glasnost), defense and human rights policies, and open, wide-spread collaboration with capitalists. With the possible exception of Lenin and his short-lived NEP, Gorbachev is the first Soviet leader to seriously use private and market-based economic applications as part of an economic policy that is integrated with other Soviet policies on a global basis.

If words were guns, one could conclude that the evolution of Soviet defense policy under Gorbachev has taken a radical turn. There are some concrete indications that this might happen, but so far this new policy is made up mainly of promissory notes. In words, Gorbachev has renounced the use of force, promised quantitative reductions in defense, and linked defense policies to economic and social perestroika. He has taken some concrete steps to curb expansionism in Afghanistan, Cambodia and Angola. More time must pass before one can conclude that Gorbachev has truly implemented a defense policy that reflects his rejection of Lenin's belief in Clausewitz's dictum, i.e., "...the world is no longer the same as it was, and its new problems cannot be tackled on the basis of thinking carried over from previous centuries. Can we cling to the view that war is a continuation of politics by other means?"23 The jury is still out. At most, Gorbachev has taken the first steps on a different, but very long road.

- (4) The traditional Soviet view that the world is divided into two hostile camps has evolved into Gorbachev's view of a multi-dimensional organism whose peoples and parts are interdependent. This view has lead to a corresponding evolution in foreign policy. Rather than concentrating on commiserating with his socialist brethren or inciting emerging nations, Gorbachev is "blitzing" the world with diplomatic initiatives designed to link the Soviets' integrated policies with the multi-faceted needs, issues and policies of "the developing world, the world of socialism and the developed world of capitalism." The changes wrought by this multi-prismed view of Gorbachev are brought into focus when one realizes that, for the first time, a Soviet leader is viewed with apprehension by his surrogates because he seems to be turning away from what they hold sacred--the prescribed, "natural" evolution of communism.
- (5) Gorbachev's turn away from the traditional evolution of Soviet policy in key areas has critical implications for the West, none more critical than how this will affect the "German Question." Although a direct Soviet proposal on German reunification is only a remote possibility, it is certainly closer than at any time since the immediate post-war period. Furthermore, the continuing evolution of Gorbachev's policies, initiatives and proposals will require NATO to deal with unique issues that the allies have not faced in their 40-plus year history (e.g. perceptions of a significant reduction in the threat, decline in public will, etc.).

The question was posed: Are Gorbachev's evolutionary charges merely new and more devious means for continuing the October Revolution? After all, Lenin said that morality, to communists, is whatever serves to destroy the exploiting society and to unite the proletariat for the "revolutionary transformation" from capitalism to communism. Well, if, under Gorbachev, the evolution of communism does indeed bring true adherence to things like universal human values, freedom of choice, self-determination, and unity in diversity, as they are understood in true democracies, and an end to the threat or use of force, the question is irrelevant -- as irrelevant as most of the October Revolution's original principles are in today's world. Lenin would be shocked, but he'd understand. As for the others, Trotsky wrote their epitaph: "The vengeance of history is more terrible than the vengeance of the most powerful General Secretary."24

In summary, Soviet policy has changed so significantly under Gorbachev, especially in the areas of glasnost, perestroika, economics, and foreign relations, that it has taken a radical turn away from the prescribed, "natural" evolution of communism. A similar turning away is occurring in defense policy; but, it is behind the others in implementation, due mainly to the dominance of the military element of power in all areas of Soviet policy.

This radical change in Soviet policy--which is not more of the same--requires from America and her allies much more than negative criticism, vacillation, "waiting to see what really happens," linear reactions to Soviet proposals, or open-armed acceptance of the new policies. What is required is a tough-minded re-evaluation of our policies in terms of a multi-dimensional world that reacts to change like an "organism," and the formulation of initiatives that, while grounded in our vital interests and values, are flexible enough to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global environment.

### **ENDNOTES:**

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